

From the Commissioner:

The Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC), a state agency of 197 employees, serves the citizens of Washington in three distinct, but equally important arenas.

As advocates, OIC employees protect and assist consumers in a variety of ways. They conduct investigations of consumer complaints, advocate for consumers when insurance companies have acted improperly, and provide free consulting services for consumers seeking help with insurance issues.

As a regulator, the OIC oversees the financial stability of insurance companies conducting business in Washington. We approve and disapprove insurance policies and rates, license agents and brokers and ensure that companies maintain stringent financial, legal and other requirements.

As educators, the OIC responds to thousands of questions and inquiries, producing and distributing consumer guides and other information to help consumers decide what insurance they need, what coverage is available and how to go about purchasing it.

We're proud of the work that our agency accomplishes on behalf of Washington residents, and 2002 proved to be a stellar year for consumer protection. During the year, the OIC successfully pursued legislation that limits the use of an individual's credit history for insurance purposes. As of Jan. 1, 2003, Washington consumers no longer face cancellation or non-renewal of their insurance policies because of their credit history. And as of July 1, certain credit information cannot be used to set premiums. When passed, this legislation was among the nation's first and it remains one of the most protective against discriminatory practices.

Later this year, Washington consumers will begin benefitting from two new laws that the OIC sought to protect against predatory lending practices and the potential financial havoc associated with illegal health insurance plans. Washington consumers were clearly winners in 2002, and the trend is continuing into 2003.

Also during 2003, the OIC set a new standard for public service, becoming the first state in the nation to implement a system for the electronic filing of premium tax forms via the Internet. All 1,369 authorized insurers, health care service contractors and health maintenance organizations filed their 2002 tax forms electronically, saving time, money and other resources on both ends of the filing process.

On a personal note, I was honored to be elected to the executive board of the National Association of Insurance Commissioners as chair of the Western Zone, representing 14 western states, Guam and American Samoa. This will ensure that the voices of Washingtonians are heard in the national debate surrounding insurance issues.

The OIC looks forward to continuing our work on behalf of Washington consumers in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Mike Kreidler
Washington State Insurance Commissioner



For the first time in recent memory, all Thurston County operations of the Office of Insurance Commissioner have been consolidated and housed under a single roof. The OIC has moved into renovated office space in Tumwater while the Capitol Campus restoration project is underway.